

**City of Austin Affordable Housing Forum:
Integrating Special Needs Housing into the Community
Agenda/Meeting Notes**

Wednesday, August 27, 2008

9:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

Street-Jones Building, 1000 E. 11th Street

44 attendees

Welcome and Introductions

- Margaret Shaw, Director, Neighborhood Housing and Community Development Office, City of Austin

Moderator

- Kelly Stewart Nichols, Neighborhood Housing and Community Development, City of Austin (Moderator)

Panelists

- Nancy Cates, Mary Lee Foundation
- Jean Langendorf, United Cerebral Palsy of Texas
- Stephanie Thomas, ADAPT of Texas

Resource Panelists

- Susan Stone, Mayor's Mental Health Task Force, Monitoring Committee
- Jeri Houchins, Re-Entry Roundtable
- Karen Langley, Family Eldercare

Panelist Presentations

Stephanie Thomas (ADAPT)

Challenge the term “special needs” – for how many persons is it “special” to be able to access the restroom. Noted that many seniors don’t think of themselves as disabled. Recommended three ways to address the issue of housing for persons with disabilities:

- Integration: Federal dollars are used to build segregated housing, i.e. housing that concentrates persons with disabilities. Accessible housing should be built in Central Austin, not in suburban areas where there are no sidewalks and bus service is lacking. Downtown: challenge developers; make the housing that is available work for people of all kinds.
- Affordability: Challenge funding sources; enable people to live anywhere in the community. Spend housing dollars on housing, not on services.
- Accessibility: Not just physical accessibility, but accessibility for people with different ways of being. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Fair Housing Act. Need to push for compliance with the law. Important to have an accepting community that embraces persons of all types. The visitability ordinance has for 10 years been an effective means of securing a degree of accessibility in single-family housing that receives City of Austin incentives, and should be part of the Building Code.

Jean Langendorf (United Cerebral Palsy of Texas)

UCP of Texas has had feedback from the disability community and has tried to model an approach to integrated housing:

- Provide consumer choice in housing options;
- Create partnerships with other housing professionals; and
- Support the belief that any person with a disability can live in the community with proper supports.

UCP Texas Initiatives:

- Texas Home of Your Own (HOYO):

Barriers to homeownership include physical, income, credit, financing, and attitudinal barriers. Many prospective buyers were unable to provide substantial down payments; it was apparent that deeper subsidies were needed. In response, HOYO worked with the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities and TDHCA (which at that time, 10 years ago, was not focused on disability issues). To address issues of needed down payments and barrier removal, HOYO was able to work with these agencies to develop a \$15,000 down payment assistance program and a \$20,000 home modification program, which are now available in many Texas cities. HOYO is working with prospective buyers to improve credit and to qualify for loans. Very few of the home sales that HOYO has assisted have had foreclosures, due in part to HOYO's Emergency Management Fund that acts as a safety net. This fund is supported by \$5 per month payments.

- Integrated HUD 811 Projects

The continuing big need for accessible housing is the rental market. Because UCP's role is not as realtor or builder but rather helping clients find housing, UCP partners with organizations that have development expertise. UCP has used HUD 811 funding to purchase units in the following developments:

- Boulevard Condominiums. Working through the private market, the organization purchased 6 condominium units in a S.M.A.R.T. Housing development, with assistance of Austin Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) in addition to HUD 811 funding. Some modifications were needed, such as roll-in showers. The units are currently rented to residents with disabilities.
- Allendale Condominiums. Working with the Austin Housing Finance Corporation, the organization purchased units in an extended stay hotel being converted into 1- and 2-bedroom condominiums. The units will be rented. The location, near Northcross Mall, allows access to transit and to retail.

- Preserving affordable, accessible housing units

An additional issue is preservation of existing accessible homes. In one instance, a disabled owner of a fully accessible house passed away, and the survivors sought to remove all of the accessible features and sell the home. UCP was able to work with the Capital Area Housing Finance Corporation to purchase and preserve the home for rental

to disabled residents. A Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) has been created to preserve housing such as this, using multiple income sources including AHFC.

Nancy Cates (Mary Lee Foundation)

Mary Lee's work began 34 years ago, when Charlene Crump saw need to assist those with traumatic brain injuries better integrate in the community. She began helping disabled women leave state institutions, which were not beneficial housing environments, and began to provide housing at a facility on South Lamar. Her vision was that persons with disabilities could take care of themselves and achieve a degree of independence. She started with four young girls, all of whom were able to learn needed life skills and eventually secure jobs. The organization now houses 50 residents and has two licensed programs – one for adults with developmental disabilities; and one for adults with brain injuries.

All of the existing units are rental, and can be used for transitional or permanent housing. One difference between Mary Lee and other housing providers is that all residents live independently in their own apartments. Most residents live with a roommate, and many have jobs. Because of Mary Lee's central location, residents can use transit and can access jobs and entertainment.

Services are available through an onsite case manager available to all residents. Residents are not required to use services. Mary Lee began to provide services after staff began to realize that an increasing number of residents needed additional help, such as assistance in setting up bank accounts or in applying for federal disability designation. An additional service is the medical support office, which provides assistance with prescriptions.

Most residents only have incomes of \$500 - \$700 per month, SSI or disability payments. Mary Lee arranges for utilities so that residents do not need to pay deposits. The rental deposit is also frequently waived. The organization also offers jobs on-site if residents have a difficult time paying rent. It is a family environment, and the staff members try to know all of the residents.

Mary Lee began purchasing property on Lamar Square Drive in 1974 (property in the area was still affordable at this time), and as its value increased, this property has become Mary Lee's endowment. In 2000, Mary Lee conducted a charette with architects, City of Austin staff, and other participants to develop a 20-year plan for the area. Implementation of this plan will entail the purchase of additional property as well as the redevelopment for low income households and persons with disabilities.

Questions

1. Kelly Nichols (moderator): *From one perspective, there is no such thing as "special" needs, since basic needs are universal. But from your experience, are there particular needs that are unique to certain groups?*

Karen Langley (Family Eldercare)

Family Eldercare developed the Lyons Gardens senior housing development in 2004. The location is central, close to a medical clinic, a senior center, and amenities. The organization's

experience after building Lyons Gardens has shown us that the “supportive housing” model does make sense. While validating Stephanie’s comments regarding developers not being service providers, there are ways that developments can provide the services on a contract basis. There is an issue of privacy, i.e. residents not wanting their landlords to have access to their private information.

In order to reach very low income households, Family Eldercare conducted extensive outreach, and as a result, 100% of residents are at 30% of median family income or below. Average rents at Lyons Gardens are \$133, and no rent is higher than \$150. All residents have access to Social Security and thus are entitled to pay as little as 25% of their income toward rent.

It has been essential to have Spanish-speaking staff and an onsite social worker. Family Eldercare’s social worker does social work such as helping residents to file Medicare and Medicaid, arranging Capital Metro Special Transit Service, and providing escorted medical visits. To build the development as well as provide the services, Family Eldercare had to do a lot of fundraising. Another senior complex opened without sufficient funding for social services and had many problems including criminal elements preying on some of the residents.

If all housing met S.M.A.R.T. Housing standards such as Green Building and Accessibility, everyone’s housing needs would be met.

Jeri Houchins (Re-Entry Roundtable)

Persons with criminal records – even a misdemeanor – are excluded from housing. Lack of a job, money for deposit, leads ex-convicts to homelessness and petty crime. Additionally, the criminal history stereotype affects female ex-convicts more.

Susan Stone (Mayor’s Mental Health Task Force)

Finding housing is even more difficult for persons with a mental illness and a criminal background. When people think of “housing” they think of “buildings,” but people with mental illnesses also need services. The Mayor’s Mental Health Task Force began following the shooting of Sophia King. The weakest part of the Task Force report is housing, which is the precondition of basic survival. There is a subset of persons with persistent mental illness that cannot function without supportive services. If we are unable to fund these services, we cannot successfully serve this population.

Jeri Houchins (Re-Entry Roundtable)

HUD is moving away from funding supportive services. Texas ranks 46th in the nation in funding supportive services. To get additional funding, it will be necessary to work with the Texas Legislature.

Karen Langley (Family Eldercare)

Family Eldercare has a program to serve veterans, those with felony convictions. For these persons, housing is the #1 issue for stabilization. Often the only housing available for mentally ill persons is personal care homes, which are often unacceptable living environments. Residents often refuse to stay there. Austin needs to address its mentally ill “infrastructure.”

Jeri Houchins (Re-Entry Roundtable)

The Re-Entry Roundtable has determined that its number one priority is housing. Many incarcerated persons reach the end of their jail term and then have no place to go. In one case, a man had been paroled but remained in prison for 18 months longer because he had no place to live.

Stephanie Thomas (ADAPT)

The Olmstead decision states that people have the right to live in the most integrated setting. The cost of a person living in a jail system could be transferred to external housing – a person can live in a hotel for the price of a lot of institutional services.

Jeri Houchins (Re-Entry Roundtable)

The TDCJ has funding for housing, but faces local barriers such as “not in my back yard” attitudes and city and county ordinances, such as zoning restrictions.

Nancy Cates (Mary Lee Foundation)

We will look at criminal backgrounds at least for safety issues.

Karen Langley (Family Eldercare)

The definition of “affordable” varies state by state and community by community. Rents of \$700-800 aren’t affordable to the people we serve; this is the amount of an entire Social Security check. The definition of affordability needs to be 30% or below median, not 50% or higher. Current tax credit rents do not reach an increasing population of low-income disabled or mentally ill persons.

2. Kelly Nichols (moderator): If you’re a non-profit advocacy group or service provider, and want to get into this type of service, how do you start the process?

Jean Langendorf (United Cerebral Palsy of Texas)

UCP had to find capacity building dollars. There are willing partners. Using a consultant as “navigator” is also recommended.

Nancy Cates (Mary Lee Foundation)

Mary Lee does much of this work ourselves. But the organization also relies on partnerships, with local, state and federal entities to pull funding together.

3. Eva Schone, Hurt Partners Architects: What is your idea of the ideal housing model? I hear what doesn’t work and success stories but not sure what I can do to help solve the problem. Many who want to contribute but are not clear what the ideal is.

Stephanie Thomas (ADAPT)

Single-family housing for persons with disabilities would be ideal, but in reality, multi-family housing is where to spend energy. New construction that requires only minor adaptability to be fully accessible is fine. It is important to remember that structures last a long time beyond the tenure of the first owner. Generic spaces are more useable by more people. Integration is key: one or two disabled or mentally ill persons in a multi-family complex is fine, but 30 persons is a lot. Mixed-income neighborhoods benefit the entire community.

Jean Langendorf (United Cerebral Palsy of Texas)

An important element of the vision is housing choices that are not segregated.

Karen Langley (Family Eldercare)

It depends; seniors often prefer to live with other seniors.

Comments

Ted Hughes: *Works for Texas Health and Human Services Commission, works with veterans and in jail diversion programs. The state's focus is primarily on jail crowding. Sheriffs are a big ally in mental health issues because they are essentially running what are essentially the state's biggest mental health institutions. Drug treatment may be successful in easing jail crowding and removing mentally ill persons from a prison environment, but only if the treatment is linked to a housing component. He recommends that the city approach the federal government regarding changing rules to accommodate the need to punish felons while also addressing mental health issues.*

Mathilde Hyams-Flores, AIDS Services of Austin: *We provide HIV / AIDS services in a consortium, and help with rent, mortgage, and utilities, and don't discriminate against those with criminal histories, but can't find places that will rent. We are now working with more homeless people and people with criminal backgrounds and credit history issues, and get many jail referrals.*

Mandy DeMayo, Diana McIver & Associates: *Many of these issues could be addressed at the state policy level. The state of North Carolina has instituted at their state housing agency a requirement that 10% of the units in each tax credit development must be set aside for supportive housing – for persons with either mental or physical disabilities. “Not in My Backyard” (NIMBY) becomes less of an issue because it is not just a project for people with schizophrenia.*

Amy Young, Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities: *Most tax credit projects serve households at 60% MFI or below, but gap financing is needed to reach those with incomes at 30% MFI or below. An increase in the state housing trust fund is needed.*

Steve Ryan, realtor/developer: *Would like to help developing affordable units for those with special needs but doesn't know where the funding is. Support the concept of the money following the client.*

Jeff Fields, Caritas of Austin: *Implementing City of Austin funded pilot project—Rapid ReHousing. Work with landlords, develop relationships and house people with criminal backgrounds.*

Belinda Carlton, Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities: *What resources are available for developers? What is “low income” vs. very “low income”? Encourages separating housing from support services and allowing the funding to follow the person, not linking people by population.*

Eduardo Magaloni, Texas Association of Community Development Corporations: *Suggests that developers approach non-profits and create partnerships, initiative of private-sector builders to work with non-profits, who also have to make bottom-line work. Designing housing to be accessible from the beginning is important, not having to make expensive modifications once it has been developed.*

Resources

- ADAPT of Texas: <http://www.adaptoftexas.org>
- United Cerebral Palsy of Texas: <http://www.ucptexas.org>
- Mary Lee Foundation: <http://www.maryleefoundation.org/>
- Family Eldercare: <http://www.familyeldercare.org/>
- Austin/Travis County Re-Entry Roundtable: <http://www.caction.org/rrt/>
- Mayor's Mental Health Task Force Monitoring Committee: <http://www.mmhtfmc.org>
- City of Austin/Austin Housing Finance Corporation Architectural Barrier Removal Program: http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/ahfc/repairs_arcbr.htm
- City of Austin/Austin Housing Finance Corporation Developer Assistance: <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/ahfc/developer.htm>
- City of Austin/Austin Housing Finance Corporation Builder Assistance: <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/ahfc/builder.htm>